



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

## Probing Cultural Dualism in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*

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### ABSTRACT

Cultural dualism is a political and cultural agenda designed to establish the cultural duplexity in a legally symmetrical way, based on hopes of achieving harmony that are well intended but often largely abstract and deceptive. Kamala Markandaya takes her place alongside the writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri to call a couple of, all of whom trace their origins to India. As a novelist, Kamala Markandaya looks at the East-West encounter with a sense of keen discernment and dispassionate objectivity. Cultural dualism forms the matrix of her vision. The way she juxtaposes two diverse cultures introduces us not only together with her creative ability and aesthetic response to the various points of view, but also provides testimony of her cosmopolitan outlook.

Keywords: culture, dualism, diaspora, objectivity, displacement

The fictional world of Kamala Markandaya reveals that she is endowed with an extraordinary vision of life, and she uses fiction as a vehicle to put it across the different cultures. Her vision is reflected in the way she treats the issues such as racial conflict, temperamental incompatibility, cultural conflict and sexual perversion in her novels. Her sensibility keeps her away from narrow provincialism and restrictive nationalism, enabling her to dramatize the tension between the two modes of living. Her experience of a multicultural situation has made her aware of problems arising out of the cultural conflict between the East and the West. To her, cultural confrontation is a forceful phenomenon that can change the very core of life and thus her fictions are essentially a product of the cultural ethos as it moulds and modifies the individual consciousness in the course of time.

As a multicultural, diasporic, post-colonial Indian living in London, she portrays, what constitutes her experience expatriate dilemma. Though she is an Indian by parentage, religion and schooling, her contact with Britain has provided her a duality of vision. With vast experiences of the country of her adoption, she perceives the challenges of the divergent cultures from close quarters. Cultural dualism constitutes the matrix of her vision and alike other expatriate writers she is deeply conscious of her "Indianness as well as of the difference in the two systems of values: One rather acquired, the other inherited and often taken for granted" (Somveer, 4)

In *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya delves insightfully into the diasporic issues and problem of expatriation. The cultural conflict between India and England is dramatized on a broader plane. The

conflict is simply not between two countries; rather it is between two modes of living of universal dimension and significance. The way she juxtaposes two diverse cultures introduces us not only with her creative ability and aesthetic response to the different points of view, but also provides evidence of her broad-based outlook.

The novel delineates the pains and privations; anguishes and agonies of the Indian immigrants in Britain through the pitiable plight of Srinivas who migrates to England a few years before the collapse of British Empire. Srinivas and Vasantha calm down on alien soil, their ties with India are more or less broken. They, along with their two sons Laxman and Seshu, make a house of their own, give it the name 'Chandraprasad' after their original home in India, although for their neighbours and others during this new land it's simply 'No. 5' and their family, the people at No.5. Cut off from their native land, they try to assimilate themselves in their adoptive land but the western biased attitude towards the aliens is seen through their relations with their neighbors. However, with the Passage of time Srinivas develops a sort of patriotic affinity with England as he tells Mrs. Pickering with pride: "This is my country now.... My country! I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own." (Markandaya 6) Srinivas who has started considering himself English by adoption is, however, soon disillusioned. His sense of belongingness receives a rude shock when Fred tells him without any reservation, "You got no right to be living in this country." (8) He had been living in England for half a century and almost is the 'nowhere man' who, after passing two-thirds of his life in England, during which he sacrificed a son to war, is heckled by racist hoodlums to travel back to his own country. He is bewildered on where he belongs: he has lived in England for thirty years and yet became a rootless, restless individual disposed of India and disowned by England. He represents many men who, for a few reason or other leave their own roots and fail to strike roots in alien soil and die as rootless, restless individuals. During his long stay in England, Srinivas tries to himself with the country. He says, "This is my country now. This is where I live, in England" (75).

In the twentieth century, specially the post-war period, has been an age of great spiritual stress and strain and has rightly been dubbed 'The Age of Alienation'. Edmund Fuller remarks that in our age "Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problems... a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence" (Fuller 18). Despite his sincere and sustained efforts to integrate into the mainstream of the alien culture and life, Srinivas is prevented from doing so by the racial fanatics. Besides, he faces harassment and humiliation on account of the racial hatred and animosity, and becomes a rootless, restless and resentful individual disposed of India and disowned by England. He becomes an outsider in an alien society.

Fred Fletcher, the English character, looks at Srinivas as a soulless black man, a trespasser with the mark of a devil. Fred maltreats Srinivas with the harsh words that he has "no right to be living in this country" (Markandaya, 164). But Srinivas retorts that he's English "by adoption" (165). Srinivas, tormented by Fred and his friends, comes to realize that he is unwanted and undesirable element in England. Srinivas tells Mrs. Pickering, "It is time...when one is made to feel unwanted, and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself" (193). Srinivas ponders over his pathetic plight: "I have been transformed into a stranger" (186). The West, in fact, has reduced him to a nowhere man. Now he realizes that he has nowhere to go to if he leaves England. He feels miserable and agonized in the harsh and hostile environment of England. He tries to make Mrs. Pickering acquainted with his fears: "It was my mistake to imagine....I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in England" (231). Though Srinivas undergoes hardships and humiliations at the hands of fanatics like Fred and his friends, he remains passive and calm, and doesn't lose his spirit and strength. In the midst of agitations arising from racial prejudice and discrimination, he tries to accept his position as an outsider. He says out of utter frustration, "I am a stranger. He muses over his situation as: An alien

whose manners, accents, voice, syntax, bones, build, way of life all of him shrieked alien!"(16) He feels terribly lonely and rootless and often resorts to the memories of past. He finds vicarious pleasure in looking in to old tin box containing Vasantha's belongings after her death. He wishes to return to India but cannot do so. He can make an expedition to the land of his birth only in imagination. There is nothing fixed or predetermined in identity and like shifting kaleidoscopic images, identities are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed regularly.

Identity is that the core issue in exploration of Diaspora, especially diasporic identity that's composed of varied factors and sub factors and may be identified with hybridism, cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes. Theorist E. H. Erikson described identity as "a subjective sense also an observable quality of private sameness and continuity, paired with some belief within the sameness and continuity of some shared world image". (Erikson 13)

Identity achievement occurs when a private has skilled a search of various identities and made a commitment to at least one but if he loses the sense of personal sameness and historical continuity, he undergoes identity crisis. An individual's identity is related with race, class and gender. Other factors such as nationality also lead to an individual's identity. National identity takes precedence over other possible identities. Srinivas and Vasantha identifies themselves as Indian and even after years never think as Londoner. Yet, identity is not something simply inherited, it is also transmitted culturally. Both identify themselves with the adopted culture in which they grew up instead of the inherited one.

Assimilation with an alien situation and culture is not possible for the immigrants until and unless they disaffiliate themselves from the native traditions and cultural systems. Laxman, the son of Srinivas, reacts to the racial problem in a quite different manner. Laxman, born, brought up and educated in England, is almost stranger to Indian culture. Moreover, he identifies himself with the English culture and life by taking part in the Second

World War and marrying an English woman. Laxman, unlike his parents, seeks a whole merger with the British society as adjunct and essential to his living. He is a pillar of the community, employer of thousands, a magistrate and member of the Hospital Management Committee. He resolves to belong to "the country in which he was born and lived and labored" (Markandaya, 293). Laxman's resolution raises hopes of his survival in England.

The characters like Dr. Radcliffe, Kent, Mr. Marjorie, Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Marjorie sustain hopes of cordial relationship even in the face of racial revulsion Dr. Redcliffe is agonized at the mounting hostility, fanaticism, distrust and envy of the so-called sophisticated people against the immigrants. He always warns Srinivas against the possibility of physical assault on him outside in the streets. He tries to comfort him with soothing words; though he is sure of the inevitable tragedy that would befall him. Srinivas's life-long battle with an alien environment comes to an end when Fred sets the house on fire. Ever since he was forced to land in London, though he has entertained the idea of returning to India now and then, but all along he earnestly tried to feel one with his adoptive country, making every effort to identify with it. But the host community never absorbed him into its mainstream; he is considered to be a trespasser and his presence has always been viewed with suspicion and anger, even by his own son. He dies a rootless, alienated individual looking for an identity of which he was robbed by circumstances. The story ends bringing the life-long battle of an individual in the pursuit of identity to a sad end. Avtar Brah rightly observes, "... Indeed culture and identity are inextricably linked concepts."(Brah, 21)

Markandaya's novels are a startling and powerful collage of the experience of uprooting and resettlement, of the intermingling of personal and social histories and of many other human dimensions involved in transplanting a new culture to a new land. Identity crises and cultural alienation faced by the expatriates, immigrants and even by the natives who become alien in their own country owing to deracination from their moorings, have been presented with deep insight in her works. Unable to identify themselves with the adopted

land and culture, migrants like Srinivas suffer from socio psychological problems such as rootlessness and alienation and continuously oscillate between two identities - one belonging to native country and culture and other to the land and culture of adoption. The novelist suggests that senseless racial antagonism and global violence are detrimental to the whole humanity. She suggests that conflicts could be resolved through love and understanding. Mutual respect would help the immigrants to emerge out of their conflicts and confusions. The survival and development of humanity lies in harmony and happiness, compromise and cordiality, not in hostility.

After the close reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*, one can come to the conclusion that she is one of those novelists who succeed in recording the inner working of the minds of her characters, their perplexities and social confrontations and endeavors to portray them as individuals growing to themselves, unfolding the delicate processes of their being and becoming. The novelist dramatizes the disvalues and inadequacies and suggests that the virtues of trust, tolerance, compassion, cordiality, involvement, responsibility and commitment can forge universal harmony by bridging the gap between the two divergent modes of living.

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